

Airing commercials after political ads actually helps sell nonpolitical products

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

About \$7 billion reportedly will be spent this fall on television and digital commercials from political campaigns and political action committees, filling the airwaves with political ads many viewers dislike.

Companies running ads immediately afterward have been concerned about the potential of a negative spillover effect on how they and their products and services are perceived.

But new research from the Indiana University Kelley School of Business finds that the opposite is true. Contrary to mainstream thought, political ads instead yield positive spillover effects for nonpolitical advertisers.

And this happens regardless of whether the political ad is an attack ad or not, who the ad supports, and whether it's sponsored by a candidate, [political party](#) or PAC. Political advertising accounts for nearly 10 percent of all U.S. television ad revenue.

The findings are in the article, "Impact of Political Television Advertisements on Viewers' Response to Subsequent Advertisements," accepted for publication in *Marketing Science* by Beth Fossen, assistant professor of marketing; Girish Mallapragada, associate professor of marketing and Weimer Faculty Fellow; and doctoral candidate Anwasha De, all from the Kelley School of Business.

"Our investigations provide insights into the previously unexplored ad-to-ad spillover effects and, more broadly, provides insights into how political messages influence consumers," Fossen said. "Nonpolitical ads that follow political ads benefit through a reduction in audience decline and an increase in positive post-ad chatter."

Using data for 849 national prime-time ads during the 2016 U.S. general election, the researchers found that ads airing after a political commercial saw an 89 percent reduction in audience decline and a 3 percent increase in post-ad chatter online.

Their findings remained consistent when examining the effect by TV network and political party affiliation.

"It seems reasonable to assume that Fox News viewers are more likely to be positively stimulated by pro-Republican ads than viewers of other channels," researchers wrote. "However, evidence from our data suggests that the positive spillover from pro-Republican ads is not higher and is nearly lower on Fox News viewership decline than when pro-Republican ads air on other channels."

They found a similar trend when it came to advertising on MSNBC, whose viewers frequently identify with the Democratic Party and progressive causes.

Mallapragada said the findings show that television networks and stations can leverage the positive spillover effects on subsequent ads by implementing differential pricing and systematic ad sequencing.

Prevailing belief in the business industry has suggested that political ads on television hurt the effectiveness of subsequent ads. To illustrate this concern, during the 2020 Super Bowl, game broadcaster Fox isolated political ads from other paying advertisers in their own ad breaks, a decision that cost the network millions in ad revenue, because it ran nonpaid show promos alongside the political ads instead of commercials from paying advertisers.

"The insights from this research enable advertisers to advocate for the inclusion of ad positioning in ad buys and, specifically, negotiate that their ads follow [political ads](#)," he said. "Our results may also encourage advertisers outside of the [television](#) context to experiment with advertising next to political content, an experimentation that may be especially beneficial for online advertisers given that they commonly blacklist political topics to avoid having their ads appear near political content."

Provided by Indiana University

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